

THE QUEEN

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Mrs. MASON'S WORK FOR EDUCATION

The Story of a Great Movement

MISS CHARLOTTE M. MASON, a record of whose life-work has just been published, will rank among the half-a-dozen or an outstanding work among the last 50 years who have left a permanent mark on the history of our country. She had, says Sir Michael Sadler, "a genius for education," and in addition a marvellous power of inspiring others not only with her own fine ideals but with the determination to put her educational aims and principles into practice.

These principles were stated by Miss Mason very simply in the last address she gave in 1922, a few months before her death, at a Conference of the Parents' National Educational Union, a society founded by her as long ago as 1887. "Let us think of our society," she said then, "as one of the 'Services,' that is, to the State; an ideal we all feel keenly about. . . . What can we do to help the State first service to the State is to present it with good citizens."

What are the qualities that go to make a good citizen, and how far does a P.N.E.U. child exhibit them? Miss Mason answered her question by stating that integrity, absence of self-consciousness, self-control, vanity; unconscious obedience, singleness of purpose and motive, intense absolute attention—that is, concentration; these were the qualities aimed at by the education given in the P.N.E.U. Schools. She claimed that the "infinitesimal power of attention in every child" was a discovery of her society which became the basis of her educational methods.

Culture—a liberal education—was the object aimed at, and she believed this was attained by the study of literature, art and nature. "Mind, capable of dealing with knowledge in its three aspects, knowledge of God, knowledge of man, knowledge of the natural world, science, mind in this sense appears to be a universal possession and everyone should have the joy and the manifold interest that such knowledge affords." She did not aim at a predominant specialist, but the all-round intelligent human being such as the great educators desired, with, however, the religious and ethical factors always in the forefront. Through the study of the Humanities the pupils gained a first-hand knowledge of some of the best things that have been often neglected; they learnt to study by themselves and discovered long before the Dalton Plan the joy of original work, of research work. "No secondary motive, marks, prizes, place or the like is required; children work with joy for the pure love of knowledge."

The Parent as Educator

PERHAPS the greatest service Miss Mason did for education was to point out the co-operation of the parent and to insist upon the value and importance of the home. The rebukes paid by parents to the personal help received from the remarkable woman, who, from the House of Education at Almside, directed and inspired a network of operations all over England, is evidence of the wonderful and widespread nature of her influence. Yet she was the centre of all test-plate, and set little store on organisation which, as it becomes more perfect, tends to the mechanical and the loss of the personal individual element.

In proportion as a piece of work needs organisation it lacks life," she would often say. "Don't make schemes for arranging the school work ahead of time. It must be fresh term by term or it will get stale." As long ago as 1888, in a pamphlet setting forth the aims and ideals of the P.N.E.U., we find three wise words: "No other part of the world's work is of such supreme difficulty, delicacy and importance, as that of parents in the right bringing-up of their children. The first obligation of the parent—that of raising forward a generation better than ourselves—rests with parents. . . . Yet parents with the responsibility of the world's future resting upon them are left to do their work, each father and mother alone, rarely getting to much as a word of sympathy, counsel or encouragement." It was to give parents the benefit of co-operation, to show that experience and wisdom of each might profit all, that the new society was formed.

A father of children brought up in a Parents' Union Schoolroom bears testimony to the joy which Miss Mason's training brought to both parents and children. "The whole training," says, "seems to invite a close companionship between parents and children through common interests. . . . Thus the interest which parents and children take in each other's lives is largely due to Miss Mason's influence in teaching us as parents to realise that our children, from earliest babyhood, are persons with their individuality of their own, and are to be treated as such, with gratitude and joy the day, eighteen or nineteen years ago, when as a young mother I started to teach my small boy, with the help of the P.N.E.U. School." She tells the books to be read, at the advice given. "Others will be trained teacher, but how much greater is the delight of the mother. . . . It was she who realised what home education, home schooling, who inspired us for our work and gave us the power to carry it out."

The Democratic Vision

MISS MASON'S work began with the parents and the children of the more insured classes, but liberal-minded and progressive as she was, and quick to realise the needs of the poor, she desired to see her principles extended to all. "What is wanted is in her last public utterance, she said: "What is wanted is a democratic education."

"In Memoriam" Charlotte M. Mason, Parents' National Educational Union

include not only the fit, the aristocracy of mind, high and low, rich and poor, but everybody. And now we of the P.N.E.U. are in a position to state that while an aristocratic education will, of necessity, reach only the fit and the few, the humanities in English meet a general appeal." A most interesting description is given in this book of memories of an elementary school in the Yorkshire coalfields, where Miss Mason's idea of supplying children from the earliest age with really good literature proved a great success; and it is remarkable that that democratic development, which only dates from 1915, has taken root in 175 elementary schools, the teachers in which are enthusiastic over the syllabus supplied from headquarters, while the children love the books and pictures which have opened up a new and beautiful world to them.

This book is the record of a wonderful woman, whose life-work should be studied by parents and teachers alike. In an age of educational fads and fashions Miss Mason's sanity of view, her broad liberal outlook, and her profound knowledge of children are a tonic and a refreshment. She was an idealist and at the moment idealism is discredited in some high quarters; nevertheless, in spite of a great local authority's recent defection, all the great things in the world that were really worth doing have been inspired by the idealists.



MISS C. MASON

By Fred Tates

INTERESTING ART COMPETITIONS

THE Royal Society of Arts is to be congratulated on its enterprise in formulating a scheme to encourage the study of design for industrial purposes. It has decided to hold annual competitions, the first of which will take place in June, 1924, and will be open to two classes of competitors, students in British Schools of Art, and all those who submit valuable prizes are offered in the form of Travelling Scholarships and money in each of the sections—Textiles, Furniture, Book Production, Pottery and Glass. Messrs. Cadbury offer a Travelling Scholarship of £50 for a poster, an illustration for the Press, or a pictorial design for a box-lid, and Messrs. Fry give a series of prizes of £10 and £25 for designs for chocolate boxes. It is by means of these competitions the work of clever young art students can be adapted to industrial purposes. The Society of Arts will have done real service to the country. All particulars may be obtained from the Secretary of the Society, John Street, Adelphi, W.C.2.

The Oxford University Press, encouraged by the success of its recent Poster Exhibition by schoolgirls, has now arranged a drawing competition among girls' schools. Competitors, who must be under seventeen years of age, are asked to produce a coloured drawing suitable for an advertisement of "Oxford Books for Boys and Girls." Professor William Robinson, Principal of the Royal College of Art, South Kensington, will act as judge, and the prizes are so arranged that both the school which has succeeded the successful competitor and the latter will benefit by the award.

Some astonishing dramatic performances have recently been given in the schools which show that a high standard is reached in the study of literature and the drama, and that much dramatic talent exists among our boys and girls. At Tonbridge School an excellent performance was given

of the "Merry Wives of Windsor," under the direction of Miss Clemence Dane and Mr. W. Arnold, the actors being scholars of the school. Four performances of "Hamlet," a difficult play adapted for schools, were imagined beforehand, an almost impossible task for schoolboys, were given at Winkley College, which bore evidence to the real enjoyment of the actors. Their work at the University of London, celebrated the centenary of that educational institution, now a college of the University of London, by an admirable rendering of that rarely-acced and strong Elizabethan tragedy, "Ardor of Feverishness."

FLORENCE B. LOW.

THE FIRST LESSONS

THE War familiarised everyone with the term *liaison officer*, and people with the importance of the work entrusted to the individuals who discharged it. It seems to me that something analogous is found in the education of a child; for although, using the term in its restricted, technical sense, *liaison* is not widely considered should start with life in the world, I suppose, the work of the educator begins when school or schoolroom is entered, the years of babyhood which precede that epoch have their own learning upon the subject. To-day, I am in something the position of the *liaison officer* between the schoolroom and the home, regarded as the schoolroom, and that of the nursery; and it is, perhaps, almost more by letters received in that department than in that these words are suggested.

The value of early teaching is a matter much debated among educationalists, and one to which there is a great diversity of opinion. It is often confused in issue with various other considerations, too, with the result that there is less clear thinking in connection with it than in other phases of a child's life. Most of us who have any knowledge of the children of the poor, for instance, deplore deeply the impossibility of furnishing the work—educational at any rate—of the nursery schools, which owe their inception and perfecting to Miss Margaret Macmillan. But when we come to analyse this regret, we find that many factors which are not actually those of education as the schools regard it are at work. The toddlers who could be gathered into these schools would be taken from already over-crowded dwellings and from the streets, safeguarded physically, and allowed to gain lessons in order and discipline which, otherwise, they would never make acquaintance with. They would still be under medical observation, too, instead of passing at two years old or so from the care of the baby clinic, to spend three, four, or even five years in the school, as they come again under the inspection of the school doctor—years fraught with any number of dangerous possibilities. But these are considerations which have little to do with education, again in the restricted sense which has its rightful place on this page. In the case of children more fortunately placed in the world, something of the same extraordinary reasoning holds good. The kindergarten and baby school are most valuable in numberless households, into which the ordinary routine of nursery life and schoolroom does not enter. They provide for the care of children during many hours of the day, taking them out of the home, and leaving mothers and servants free from the responsibilities which would otherwise have to be provided for. Again, such schools provide what is often so much needed for such children—the companionship of their peers, with all the lessons of give-and-take, as well as the joy of communal existence, which it brings. But here again, we are apart from education proper and simple, although, obviously, that is the manner best suited to the age of the child and under the care of a specialist, goes hand in hand with the other advantages in such schools, whether for the poor or the rich.

But when we best the child to the actual consideration of what is learned, I do not think these early days—may, before the seventh birthday—matter very much. Matter is that some (rare) children have a gift which even when put the child into the right attitude of mind to receive the serious matter of education when the time comes. Let it be a little thing run wild until it is a vice or virtue, and then it is learning, at definite time and place, which is of value. Children vary immensely at that age as well as later on. Some have a gift for letters, strapping them into words, learning to count, and so on. Others have a natural inclination in the matter of numbers, and a little later on, when the bent towards it has been given the busy days laid off, observation and learning to be master of its cultivated, and the child has learned to be master of its faculties, whether of mind and body, immature as these necessarily may be. Memory is a faculty which is not cultivated too, but such early days, and can do so without the least forcing, which cannot be too much deprecated in any education. And the greater the store of facts in the memory, the less the child has to do in the notes of the past, may well be said, if only because they are so much more easily mastered at a very early age than later.